

The Art of Dying

An Eastern Approach

Thomas Paul Emerson

INNERSIGHTS
DANA POINT, CALIFORNIA

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Introduction

In our American culture, for the most part, we really understand very little about death. There are very few verses in the Bible that discuss what happens to us after we die. In the Far East, however, a great deal has been revealed about the experience of dying. The eastern scriptures explain that when a person dies there are different stages that a person's soul goes through after death, and our experience of these stages depends in part on our frame of mind at the time of death. That's why they say in the east that our state of mind at the time of death is so important. "Whatever occupies the mind at the time of death determines the destination of the dying; always they will tend toward that state of being" (Bhagavad Gita 8:6).

In the last few pages of this workbook there are some Tibetan verses that are recited to a dying person, and they are from The "Tibetan Book of the Dead," composed over 1,200 years ago by Swami Padmasambhava. He was a Tibetan sage who wrote down his descriptions of the death

experience, and they became known as the “The Great Liberation by Hearing” (or The Tibetan Book of the Dead). Swami Padmasambhava’s descriptions are also not unlike some people today who have had Near Death Experiences (page 29), and they too report very similar out-of-body experiences.

Padmasambhava was born in Pakistan, and after many years of meditation his awareness allowed him to experience the stages that you go through between life and death before he actually died. He found that during these states he experienced a disappearance of his physical surroundings, and this would take him into a radiant world within himself that was beyond words. Here he saw his life, the God’s, angels, and ghosts. This was then followed by a re-entry into his own personality again. He realized that this was the same process that happens to us at the time of death, when the soul leaves the body and goes to heaven. He experienced these states, which he called “bardos,” and he passed this knowledge on to his students.



Swami Padmasambhava

(Also known as Guru Rinpoche, which means "precious master")

Around 800 A.D. Padmasambhava traveled to Tibet and his teachings, including this one about death, mixed with the local religion to form "Tibetan Buddhism." Before Padmasambhava died he buried some scrolls containing his teachings in the Gampodar Mountains in central Tibet. Perhaps he wanted to make sure to preserve this knowledge by hiding it, because in those days when an enemy conquered a kingdom they would often destroy any records of that culture.

Therefore, these texts about death were hidden away for many years, and once they were re-discovered the text was read for centuries as a burial rite. When the time came to die, these sayings would be read to the dead to help guide them to heaven. It is said that monks later with the aid of these verses could also guide their own awareness on to these various heavenly realms, which they call the "Pure Land," or Land of Bliss (*Aparimitāyur-sūtra*).

The monks believed that a glimpse of these spiritual states could also be experienced in a variety of ways. The lamas say that it happens sometimes in meditation, or sometimes just before waking-up or going to sleep; sometimes while sneezing, fainting, or during a sexual climax. Sometimes an accident or sudden illness can bring on a spiritual state, as well as through a drug reaction or anesthesia.

Western Translation

In 1919, an anthropologist, Walter Evan-Wendtz, found the Tibetan Book of the Dead in Almora India, in a small

monastery. He spent three years with a lama translating the text, and his first translation appeared in English in 1927.

According to these scriptures, at death the departed soul may still be aware of the location of their physical body and they can still see and hear us. This provides us an opportunity to communicate with them. It is believed that the average length of time a person remains aware of their earthly surroundings after death is about three or four days, which usually coincides with the time between the person's death and their burial. It is believed therefore, that when this information is read to a person who has just died, or is dying, the person can actually hear these words and it can help assist them on their way to the next world. A priest or a loved one can read the verses close to the deceased person's ear, to help guide them on their way (**these verses that you read to the dying start on page 113**).

Our western equivalent of these verses is our funeral service. In our ceremony a priest or pastor usually speaks in the presence of the dead, of the existence of heaven, God, and God's mercy. Testimonies of the person's love and worth are often shared, and God is asked to take this person's soul to heaven. This is our equivalent of reading the Tibetan verses.

A couple very popular Bible verses that are often recited at funerals are; Psalm 23:

**The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.**

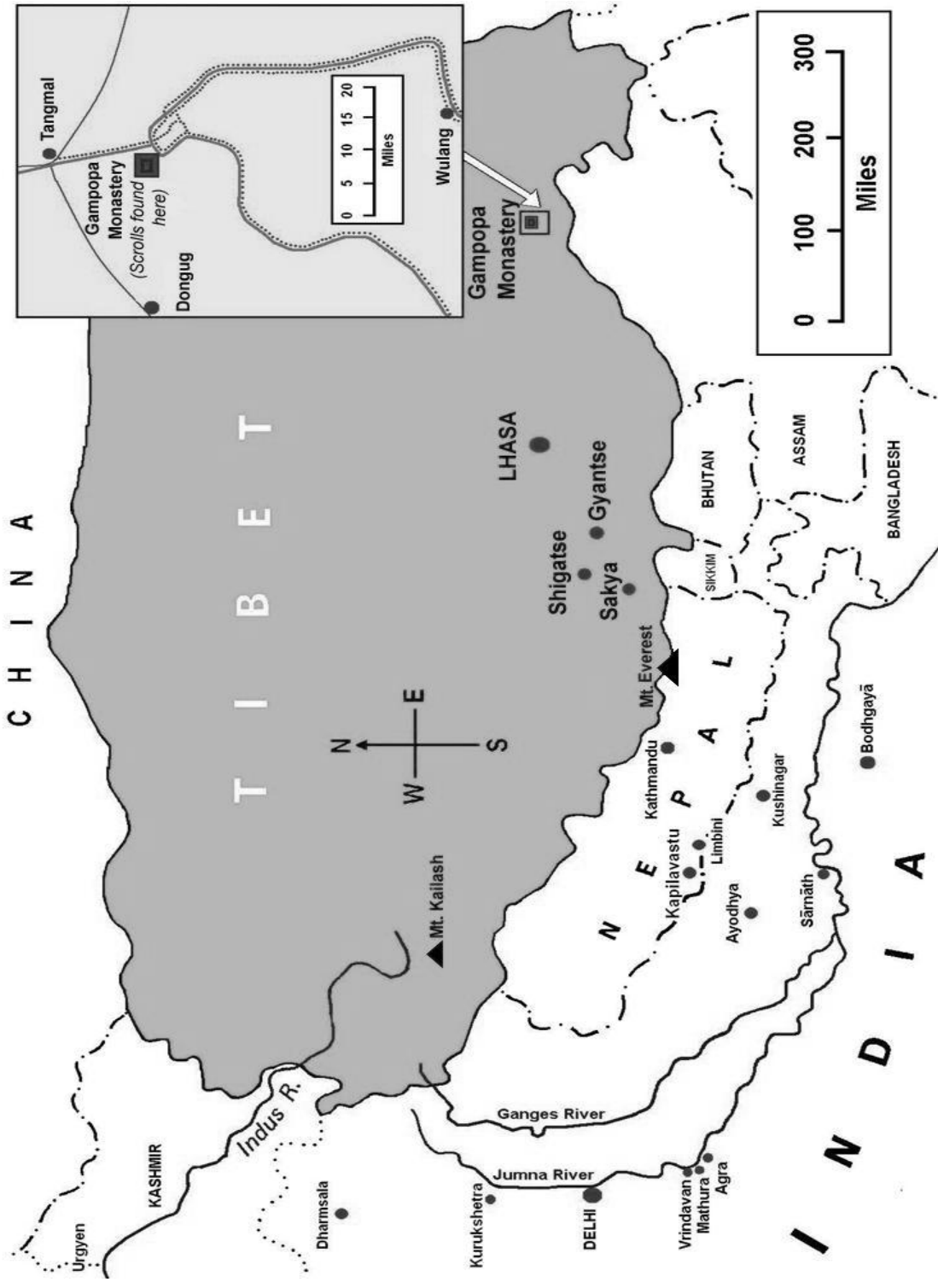
**Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my
enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.**

Psalm 31:1-5

**In You, O Lord, I put my trust;
Let me never be ashamed;
Deliver me in Your righteousness.
Bow down Your ear to me,
Deliver me speedily;
Be my rock of refuge,
A fortress of defense to save me.**

**For You are my rock and my fortress;
Therefore, for Your name's sake,
Lead me and guide me.
Pull me out of the net which they have
Secretly laid for me,
For You are my strength.
Into Your hand I commit my spirit;
You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.**

The map on the following page shows where the Tibetan Book of the Dead was found in a monastery in southeast Tibet.



In This Workbook

This workbook is not intended to present a comprehensive study of Buddhism or eastern religion. Instead, it is to share an eastern perspective on such topics as aging, death and dying. We'll cover a little bit of the background of everyday life, so you'll see a social context of how these teachings fit into their everyday lives. And we'll also briefly cover some basic visualizing, meditating, and chanting techniques used by the Buddhist's to achieve a higher state of consciousness.

Most foreign words have been deliberately removed from the original texts, and replaced with the English equivalent, but the basic descriptions are the same. There are still the same realms and stages, and you can imagine God looking anyway you like. The God of wisdom you can imagine looks like he's from a Michelangelo painting if you like, because their visual appearance is not important; it's what they represent that is essential. Just like every culture has a "God," or a "cupid" image—all of them different—but they all represent the same thing. Dr. Carl Jung called this an "archetype," and like God; God exists in all cultures, just pictured in different ways. Some Near Death patients also see different appearances for God; for some people God is a beautiful glowing sun or light, or a Goddess, or an unexplainable sense of Oneness. Or some see God as Jesus, Buddha, or Krishna.

These teachings, most of all, will hopefully reveal that there is no need to fear death, or be in the dark as to what to expect at the time of death. And, we certainly shouldn't spend our retirement years feeling that our life is empty

when there are so many people to help, and so much to learn.

*Don't grieve for me, for now I'm free
I'm following the path God laid for me
I took his hand when I heard his call
I turned my back and left it all*

*I would not stay another day
To laugh, to love, to work or play
Tasks left undone must stay that way
I've found that peace at the close of the day*

*If my parting has left a void
Then fill it with remembered joy
A friendship shared, a laugh, a kiss
Ah, yes, these things I too will miss*

*Be not burdened with times of sorrow
I wish you the sunshine of tomorrow
My life's been full, I savored much
Good friends, good times, a loved one's touch*

*Perhaps my time seemed all too brief
Don't lengthen it now with undue grief
Lift up your heart and share with me
God wanted me now. He set me free*

(Author unknown)



Chapter 1

The Afterlife

Think of when you have had a dream; don't you feel like you are really there? That's because feeling exists in a finer density level than that of the physical world. So feeling still exists when you go to a subtler level than physical world. So when the physical world drops away (we float out of our body), the dimension of feeling, emotions, sight, sound, and smell are still very present. Heaven is just consciousness without the denser manifestation of physical energy. We tend to think so much of the material world as being our real world, that we don't realize that atoms and energy are just more dense than the next world. The scriptures tell us that it's actually consciousness that supports, and is the foundation of both the material and spiritual worlds. And consciousness can exist with even a much greater and richer reality without the material world. That is why our dreams and the spirit world are so much more vast and unlimited, and closer to God.

These scriptures explain that our physical world actually starts as a thought. For example, God has the thought, "Let there be light," and THEN there is light. It all starts with a thought from God, and then the rest of creation unfolds as

one thought of God after another. Each thought that God has naturally varies in density, from the thought of “light,” or a subtle spirit; and then on to denser things like a person or a tree. Some material thoughts are very dense like a “rock,” and some lighter like a “cloud.” For example, while we may perceive this physical world through our eyes, the scriptures tell us that there exists another subtle spirit world where there are also waterfalls, sunsets, and rainbows, even more beautiful than here on earth.

Stages of Death

There are described four stages to death; the first is the moment when the body ceases to function, but the person is still conscious. Their body may be in a coma, or their heart may have stopped. At first, they may be unaware that they are even dead. Next, the person's soul may feel as if it's floating in space, free of their body, and they can continue to see their body and their surroundings; sometimes as though they are looking down on their body from up-above. Here, they report feeling this unbelievable sense of freedom and joy. These scriptures tell us that in this stage there is no time and space as we know it. For example, if you imagine being somewhere—you are instantly there.

In the second stage, the soul is drawn to enter a clear white light, which can appear immediately after death or take days to appear. Here they can pass through this light into a paradise, sometimes through a tunnel. And this world is more spectacular than here on earth, with heavenly sights, sounds, and smells. The spirit world is actually a very real place for us. They say even more real to us than

the earth, and we are told that we feel even more at home there. Right after death if a person is eager to see what awaits them in the next world, they will feel drawn to this light and they won't usually feel apprehensive to go into the light. If the person feels apprehensive or reluctant to enter the light, this is where they can wind up in a not so pleasant place. Here, fear can produce frightening images like in a nightmare, and any sadness can attract the wrong kind of spirit to the departed. This is where the lamas say that the reading of The Tibetan Book of the Dead can be very helpful to guide the soul on its way.

The third stage is the "judgment day," where after the person passes through the light into heaven, they see all the highlights or important moments of their life. Here our earthly life is seen through our spiritual perspective, then years of events on earth can be seen to occur in just a few moments. Just as you see that your dreams as imaginary when you wake up, during this stage your earthly life is seen as dream-like through the eyes of your soul. And we are able to judge our own life with our own enhanced conscience, which we now experience with a much greater spiritual understanding. We see exactly what we have done, and why. If we have been particularly bad, we may be struck by regret and sadness over the way we have treated others. In the spirit world we may experience this feeling that we don't deserve to live happily after all the pain that we have caused others. Therefore, various painful events can come our way, perhaps in the form of the same disappointments and pain that we have caused others. The scriptures tell us that during our life on earth we may not be consciously aware of the kind of person we have been, but our unconscious mind sees our entire life clearly. After death through this panoramic view we see what motivations are behind all the

things we have done. At this point, the Tibetans say that the person is aware of the presence of God, and may even see God, and that they can appeal to God's compassion to perhaps be allowed a final resting place in heaven. If not they must be reborn on earth again after a period of time. Our consciousness as it manifests through our body is usually too dense to include the spirit world, but our soul is part of that dimension.

The Buddhists have what they call the "Eight-fold Path" (page 53), which reads very much like the Ten Commandments. It stresses the importance of not harming anyone, and includes standards such as, right conduct, right effort, right resolve, and so forth. In other words, by living our lives according to the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," we will be free of regrets and self-condemnation both in this world and in the next.

The fourth stage is re-entry, or rebirth of the soul on earth, which occurs when the soul enters the next body. Due to all our actions, our destiny is created so that our soul re-enters the world at the precise time that allows it to continue where it left off. It is not left up to chance or just a coincidence; the soul is born with a new body into those circumstances that carry on from where it left off, inheriting all of the good and bad effects it has created for itself. The time between births can vary greatly—from an almost instant rebirth, to many years between lives. Like in a dream, time as we know it isn't the same in the spirit world. Have you noticed that when you wake-up from a dream, what might have seemed like a long time, perhaps weeks or days of events in dreamtime, has actually taken place in only a very few minutes while asleep? That's what the time difference is like in the spirit world.

Spirit World

The spirit world, also called the “astral plane,” is the dimension where the soul dwells between lives, and it’s much less dense than the earth. The lower dimension of this plane is what we call “hell,” and it has the same types of extreme suffering that we have here on earth. The spirit world can go either direction—heaven or hell—just like hot or cold, or light or dark in the physical world. The spirit world also contains higher planes where souls are super conscious and have bodies of light. These souls may also be involved in helping people here on earth, and we call them angels or guides. There is also a cartoon or animated realm, which is very similar to what we have created through movies.

A question is often asked; is our soul aware of the physical world, or is it asleep once we are born? The lamas say that the soul is always conscious. Let’s say an elderly man dies, and leaves behind a widow. Perhaps one day the widow thinks, “Before long I’ll be back together with my husband once I pass on.” Perhaps two years goes by here on earth and the husband’s soul is reborn as a child to the couple’s daughter. Now, if the widow dies a few years later, does that mean that her husband isn’t still in the spirit world? No, they tell us that we’re always a soul in the spirit world, even when our soul is being a person on earth. In other words, he might say to his wife when he sees her in heaven, “I’m now our granddaughter to our youngest daughter Peggy.”

Then, the lamas say that from a slightly higher perspective we see that we are also all the souls and all the people that

we see. This is what people like Buddha realize when they experience Enlightenment. It's like when you have a dream and you see that there are several people in your dream, and yet you are the one that has imagined all of them. You are all of the characters. While having the dream, however, you imagine that the characters are all separate people; perhaps they are even having a conversation among each other. In this same way, Buddha taught that we are ultimately the Eternal Spirit (Self) that has conceived of this existence and everything in it. When Buddha awakens he sees that this universe is a dream that he's having. In the Bible Jesus says, "For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21).

Infinite Oneness

According to these scriptures, a soul sees a brilliant clear light after death, and they can enter into it. Here the Soul experiences "nirvāna," or the infinite oneness of existence. Just like some people say that they believe that when they die they will simply dissolve back into a cosmic sea of energy; these scriptures say that this is what you might experience. However, most people will eventually regain a consciousness that they haven't actually let-go of. When most people die they mentally cling to certain aspects of their life, and they may wish they could go on living; and this is the thought that they carry with them into the next world. For instance, imagine that you are reading a book, and you are involved in the book but you get tired and fall asleep? Won't you usually start reading from where you left off? You'll start again back to where you can remember; just because you fall asleep doesn't mean that you won't have

the same mind later on. This is the same principle that applies when we reincarnate. For most souls there is a re-entry phase where they are reborn, because they have karma or learning to go through, or they still want to experience something.

However, if you see that you are the Infinite Spirit, then when you enter the white light after death there is no need for you to reincarnate, because you have seen for yourself that this sense of separateness is just an illusion. Just like when you wake up from a dream, you're no longer under the illusion that you are still a part of that dream.

Karma

The way that karma works; let's say that I donate some money to a charity, I'm not obligated to do anything for the money. Someone may choose to recognize me for my donation, but I have no obligation as a result of giving the money. However, if I borrow money from someone, then I have a debt to pay back, and I am instead obligated. In this same way, if you leave this life with a positive balance sheet, in other words, you have given more in your lives than you have taken, then you leave this world without any debt. If instead I'm a taker, and let's say I'm always trying to get as much as I can for myself, and I do as little as possible in return. I may leave this life with a debt that will need to be paid back in the future. That's why the scriptures tell people to try and make sure they go to heaven without any physical or emotional debts. Here's another example; let's say I don't want to work, and I figure out some illegitimate way to scam money, such as a phony disability claim or some other kind of fraud. I will be incurring a debt unless I've already earned

this advantage. Even if I collect money in some other legal way, like through panhandling, or unemployment or welfare, it's still a dept.

Heaven

Higher up in the “starry region,” are what are known as temporary heavens. These are actually very nice places where the soul can go, where there are no problems, so no one really awakens completely either from their ego in these realms. Some of these worlds are also considered a sort of purgatory, since there is no likelihood of any real awakening, and this is where souls usually go in-between lives. You can live in a completely happy illusion in these worlds, and they are most often what people refer to as “heaven.” The scriptures say that these worlds extend up through the earth’s atmosphere to the star Polaris (Pole Star).

To understand heaven, they say imagine a world that has all the desired features of earth, without the undesirable parts! There is no crime in heaven—because there is nothing that you need to steal—because you can create whatever you want. So criminal activity simply doesn’t exist. There is no need to eat, sleep, or work, but you can do all those things if you want too. There is no poverty, over crowding, pollution, or war—unless again you’re in one of the lower realms and you get dragged into some kind of struggle due to your conscience. In heaven there are beautiful green forests, mountains, rivers, and meadows everywhere, not to mention gorgeous lakes, streams, rainbows, and waterfalls.

All the animal creatures live in harmony; there are no predators or those who are hunted.

The weather conditions are perfectly delightful. There are the most magnificent sunsets, stars, and sunrises beyond belief. If you want to be artistic, and paint or draw, or play a musical instrument, or cook, or sing—you can do whatever you want. If you want to imagine a home, a garden, or a sailboat—you can create anything you want. You can also imagine yourself to look anyway you want. Souls can imagine themselves to look the way they always wanted to look on earth. These are some of the reasons why people usually want to stay in heaven. The catch is; you can't stay there if you have karma that must be on earth, or if you haven't actually awakened ultimately from the illusion of being somebody. Your character's progress ends at death, just like if you reach the end of a chapter in a book. When you're reborn your character starts from where it left off.

Our interest today to create a *virtual reality* is actually our attempt to create this imaginary aspect of heaven here on earth. In heaven there are games like *Star Wars*, and you can join the Jedi Knights and fly with them; it's like a game in the afterlife. There's also every other virtual adventure you can imagine.

On earth there are also people who want someone waiting for them on the other side. They want to meet a person or a group here on earth, and have them waiting in heaven. This is the promise or pledge of many churches and temples; that is to have a meeting with their followers once they arrive in heaven. In many cases there are souls on the other side that want to be part of a group, and they are more than willing to participate.